The Emperor's New Clothes? The Utility of Identity in Roman Archaeology

MARTIN PITTS

Abstract

This paper discusses the concept of identity as an increasingly central research theme in Anglo-American Roman archaeology. The first part provides an overview and critique of the issue in recent academic discourse, highlighting some potential theoretical and methodological problems. I argue that, if pursued uncritically, there is a danger that approaches to identity are reducible to the search for diversity for diversity's sake, and even worse, that identity is simply read off from archaeological remains in a culture-historical fashion. In the second part, I use two case studies to outline a new approach to the construction of narratives of identity that emphasizes the constitution of identity through dynamic social practices instead of a direct one-to-one relationship between identity and static material culture. I contend that identity is best investigated through methodologies specifically designed to elucidate aspects of social practice through archaeological evidence rather than simply identify variability in material culture.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a growing number of Roman archaeologists in Britain and North America have become interested in identity as a research theme, which has represented a major unifying theme in the humanities and social sciences since the 1990s.[1] This concept is now optimistically regarded by many as a means of transcending the tired issue of Romanization,[2] which has in recent years dominated the writing of narratives in Britain and beyond.[3] Put simply, the debate on Romanization has been largely polarized between the traditional interventionist approach, that Rome intentionally taught "native" elites to become Roman,[4] and the noninterventionist approach, claiming that Rome did not consciously pursue a policy of Romanization, stressing the role of indigenous involvement in the process.[5] This debate is problematic for two reasons. First, it is arguable that the intentions of the Roman authorities are for the most part irrelevant (whether pro-integration or not), not least in view of the large gulf that exists between the formulation and effective implementation of social policies (i.e., even if the Roman elite wanted to spread their culture in the provinces, it does not follow that conquered peoples would be any more receptive). Second, and more important, the focus on Romanization promotes a very narrow "Roman versus native" perspective on everyday life and how social change occurred. As Hill observed, "Romano-British archaeology has always been concerned with the study of identity, but only in one very narrow dimension . . . the differences and adoptions between Roman and native."[6] The potential advantage of studying identity is that it provides a means of liberating Roman archaeology from the Roman-native dichotomy, encouraging research into regional, subethnic, gender, and class identities.[7]

Although the interpretive perspective offered by identity in Roman archaeology has clear advantages over the term "Romanization," there is room for caution. Doubts over the value of identity studies have been voiced by Brubaker and Cooper: "whatever its suggestiveness, whatever its indispensability in certain practical contexts, 'identity' is too ambiguous, too torn between 'hard' and 'soft' meanings, essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers, to serve well the demands of social analysis."[8] As with "Romanization," the ambiguity of the term "identity" is potentially its major undoing insofar as it is able to form the basis of analytical perspectives for understanding social change. Furthermore, it can be said that such ambiguity has fostered the spread of shallow conceptualizations of identity in Roman archaeology, promoting interchangeability with the term "Romanization" with-

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[1] Jenkins 2004.
[2] E.g., Mattingly 2004, 2006; Hingley 2005.
[3] Laurence 2001.
[4] E.g., Frere 1987.
[5] E.g., Millett 1990a, 1990b; cited in Grahame 1998b.
[6] Hill 2001, 15.
[7] Hill 2001, 15.
[8] Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 2.

out any real shift in analytical mind set. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to review current approaches to identity in Roman archaeology in terms of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches and to examine whether or not this trend is a case of "the emperor's new clothes."

Despite a burgeoning array of literature on the subject, to date there have been few attempts to critique approaches to identity in Roman archaeology or to assess the concept as a direction for future research. One example is an article by Mattingly that focuses on a discussion of the latest theories of Romanization, rather than critiquing approaches explicitly concerned with the issue of identity per se.[9] The present study is intended as a counterpart that skirts the subdisciplinary baggage of Romanization and confronts the issue of identity directly. This paper is set out in two sections. The first examines recent scholarship on identity in Roman archaeology in terms of two fundamental questions: how does the study of identity lead to a greater understanding of sociocultural change in the Roman world, and how can identity be ascribed from material remains? The second part explores the formation of narratives of identity in two case studies in addition to considering future directions for research.

IDENTITY AND ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGY: CURRENT TRENDS AND CRITIQUE

This section addresses the character of research explicitly concerned with the theme of identity in Anglo-American Roman archaeology. To facilitate this, I surveyed a large corpus of British and North American literature on the topic. The principal aim was to gain an appreciation of the broader state of affairs concerning the study of identity in Roman archaeology, stressing the different aspects of identity being inferred and the main classes of evidence used in analysis. Of course, by limiting the scope of the survey to English-language scholarship alone,[10] this review cannot claim to be truly representative of the totality of Roman archaeology. Nevertheless, I hope that this article provokes further comparisons and encourages dialogue across existing language barriers. The survey was intended to be as representative as possible, sampling a range of publications and relevant journals. Mainstream journals, such as the *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, were covered in the survey, but they contained comparatively few articles with an explicit focus on identity in stark contrast to, for example, the proceedings of the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference (TRAC).[11] The following discussion is based on a review of 64 Anglo-American publications from 1995 to 2005 dealing with identity in Roman and late prehistoric archaeology.[12]

The content of each article or book was classified by the aspects of identity addressed, and these classes of evidence were then scrutinized. Because the expression of identity is very much a situational construct, with different aspects being stressed in different contexts, I simplified matters by choosing three separate categories of trends in the material surveyed. These were cultural identity (pertaining to ethnicity and usually involving some consideration of Roman versus "other" local or regional identities), class and status identity (relating to group hierarchies and the position of the individual within society), and gender identity (concerning the expressions of gender, sex, and age). This categorization is not intended to function as a rigid taxonomy of identities but rather as a means of characterizing the facets of identity most apparent in the literature under scrutiny (issues surrounding definitions of identity are dealt with below, under "Inferring Identity"). Similarly, based on trends in these publications, I chose 12 general areas of study. These were architecture (buildings, households), art (imagery, wall painting, sculpture), epigraphy (inscriptions in stone), faunal remains (animal bones), floral remains, funerary evidence (including osteoarchaeological material), literature (the classical sources), monumentality (nondomestic architecture, usually of high status), pottery (ceramic vessels), settlement (morphology and landscape archaeology), small finds (portable material culture other than pottery), and, finally, those studies of a more theoretical nature not based on any particular class of evidence.

[9] Mattingly 2004.

[10] Largely a result of the author's linguistic shortcomings vs. any deliberate bias.

[11] TRAC is an annual conference for Roman archaeologists in the United Kingdom. It started as a one-off event to address a concern that Roman archaeology was not theoretical enough compared with the rest of archaeology (Scott 1993a), esp. prehistory, but has since become a regular fixture (Laurence 2006). It is now conventionally regarded as a forum for Ph.D. students and more established researchers to air research of a more theoretical nature.

[12] Reviewed publications include Meadows 1995, 1997, 1999; Roymans 1995, 2004; Fitzpatrick 1996; Jones 1997; Robinson 1997; D'Ambra 1998; Grahame 1998a, 1998b; Hope 1998, 2001; Isserlin 1998; Jundi and Hill 1998; Laurence 1998; Lomas 1998; Petts 1998a, 1998b; Pohl 1998; van Dommelen 1998, 2001; Wells 1998, 1999, 2001; Woolf 1998, 2001; Zanker 1998; Clarke 1999; James 1999, 2001a, 2001b; Matthews 1999; Revell 1999, 2000; Creighton 2000; Eckardt 2000, 2002; Swift 2000; Aldhouse Green 2001; Allason-Jones 2001; Baker 2001; Carr 2001, 2005; Gardner 2001, 2002; Gowland 2001, 2004; Hawkes 2001; Hill 2001; Spradley 2001; Webster 2001; Lucas 2002; Perring 2002; Crummy and Eckardt 2003; Hales 2003; Hingley 2003, 2005; Raja 2003; Roth 2003; Mattingly 2004; Monteil 2004; Pitts 2004, 2005a.

All publications were divided according to the categorization systems described above. For example, Swift's monograph on Late Roman dress accessories is concerned with cultural, class, and gender identities, and it is principally based on small finds.[13] Although subjective, the consistent quantitative nature of this review allows any findings to be assessed with greater confidence. The main output of this exercise is presented in graphical form in figures 1 through 5.

Figure 1 shows a breakdown of the different types of publications in the survey. Approximately half of the literature surveyed was published in the proceedings of postgraduate conferences, especially TRAC (accounting for 34%), which has been largely (but not exclusively) dominated by the work of postgraduate students. The remaining 16% of this category are selected papers from other postgraduate conference proceedings published outside TRAC.[14] Although this might suggest some bias in the sampling strategy, it is more plausible that doctoral students were simply some of the first scholars to be interested in what is a relatively recent theme in Roman archaeology. By comparing publications from the late 1990s with those of the last five years, however, it is apparent that this situation has already begun to change. From 1995 to 1999, 56% of publications surveyed were in postgraduate proceedings, whereas in the years 2000 to 2005, this figure had dropped to 46%, with a greater volume of output on the subject in books and articles. In addition, the last five years accounted for 63% of the total number of articles and books surveyed, indicating a rise in interest in the topic. These trends show an increased concern with identity beyond the sphere of postgraduate conferences and seems to be a result of two factors: the recent employment of some of the postgraduates and an upsurge in interest among established academics and members of the profession. Therefore, not only is identity an increasingly popular research theme in Anglo-American Roman archaeology, it is also attracting attention from both new and established generations of academics. With this in mind, the rest of this section addresses the nature of this discourse.

The Role of Identity in Roman Archaeology

Figure 2 shows the relative proportion of different identity categories discussed in the sample of publications surveyed. The most striking feature of this graph is the prominence of cultural (or ethnic) identity, accounting for more than 60% of the discourse. This category has been defined as "that aspect of a person's self-conceptualization which results from identification with a broader group in opposition to others on the basis of perceived cultural differentiation and/or common descent"[15] and "the self-conscious recognition by a group of individuals of commonalities that emerge through their conformity to similar ways of acting and being . . . the possession of similar cultural traits, such as language, styles of dress, personal adornment, material objects and particular ways of behaving."[16] In the bulk of literature surveyed, such emphasis on cultural identity is most often expressed in terms of describing the diversity of local responses to Roman imperialism. For example, Jones undermines the concept of Romanization as a uniform process by showing significant variability in material culture at several Late Iron Age and Roman sites in southeast Britain;[17] Woolf highlights the diversity of experiences of becoming Roman in Gaul;[18] van Dommelen discusses the persistence of Punic cultural identity in Roman Sardinia;[19] and Roymans makes a convincing case for the construction of a new Batavian cultural identity in the early Roman empire.[20] Also included in this category are approaches to regional identity reflecting spatial manifestations of cultural identity. In all these examples and many others, sociocultural change in the Roman period is increasingly seen in terms of the expression and articulation of diverse cultural identities, rather than recourse to the monolithic and Romano-centric paradigm of Romanization.[21]

Clearly, one of the main strengths of approaches to identity in the Roman world is the implicit rejection of Romanization as a passive and blanket phenomenon, or "the process of homogenization evident in the sequence of material culture in the first century BC and the first century AD in the area between the Mediterranean and the North Sea."[22] The primary focus on the cultural aspects, however, betrays a continued obsession with the nature of interaction between Roman and native, even though these apparent binary opposites are increasingly characterized in a complex and fragmented manner. In this sense, recent approaches to cultural identity merely represent the latest riposte in the continuing debate about Romanization, rather than form a separate line of intellectual inquiry. This is in part a result of the need to deconstruct models of Romanization by showing that diversity exists that

[13] Swift 2000.
[14] E.g., Laurence and Berry 1998; Merryweather and Prag 2003.
[15] Jones 1997, xiii.
[16] Grahame 1998a, 159.
[17] Jones 1997, 129–35.
[18] Woolf 1998.
[19] van Dommelen 1998, 2001.
[20] Roymans 2004.
[21] E.g., Swift 2000; Crummy and Eckardt 2003; Pitts 2005a.
[22] Reece 1990, 30.

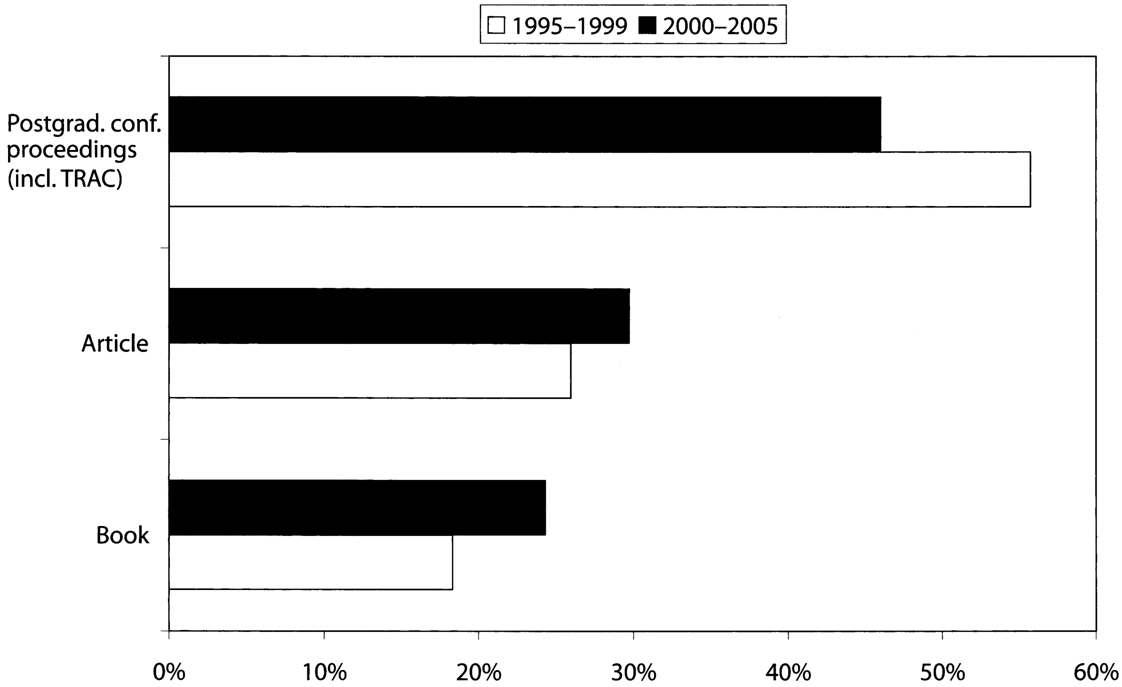

Fig. 1. The relative proportion of types of publication in a survey of 64 articles and books concerned with identity in Roman archaeology in 1995–1999 and 2000–2005.

is not easily explained by traditional narratives. The ultimate danger of this approach is that it becomes a descriptive process, looking for diversity for diversity's sake, rather than explaining how such diverse identities were negotiated in the context of the Roman empire. Furthermore, there is a fine line between mapping diversity and attempting to "measure" Romanization, which has already been extensively criticized.[23] In order to remain a valid research theme, we must study identity holistically rather than focus solely on the ethnic dimension.

After cultural identity, the next most popular category is class and status, accounting for more than 25% of the discourse (see fig. 2). In contrast to the definitions of cultural identity given above, this category refers to the relative positioning of an individual within the social hierarchy, and has already been discussed in the context of Roman archaeology as social identity, defined by Grahame as "relationships such as family ties, personal networks of friends and other associates, peer group membership, class allegiance, social status and the like."[24] Since the term "social identity" in anthropological and sociological literature conventionally refers to identity as a generic phenomenon, not specifically its hierarchical components, status and class are preferred here.[25] In the literature surveyed, approaches to this category of identity are mostly concerned with studies of social status and specific hierarchical and occupational subgroups within society,[26] especially the military.[27]

In the past, the study of social status in Roman archaeology has been dominated by a focus on elites and state institutions such as the military, a phenomenon that has recently been criticized.[28] Such an explicit elite focus is less apparent in the literature surveyed, perhaps indicating that this criticism is being heeded by the new generation. Figure 3 illustrates that far from being dominated by studies of types of material culture generated typically by the upper tiers of the social hierarchy (i.e., epigraphy, monumentality,

[23] E.g., Woolf 2001, 173.
[24] Grahame 1998a, 159.
[25] Jenkins 2004, 4.
[26] E.g., Robinson 1997; see also Hope 1998; Zanker 1998; Revell 2000; Perring 2002; Gowland 2004; Pitts 2004.
[27] E.g., James 1999; see also Eckardt 2000; Gardner 2001; James 2001a.
[28] James 2001b; see also Hingley 2005, 91–116.

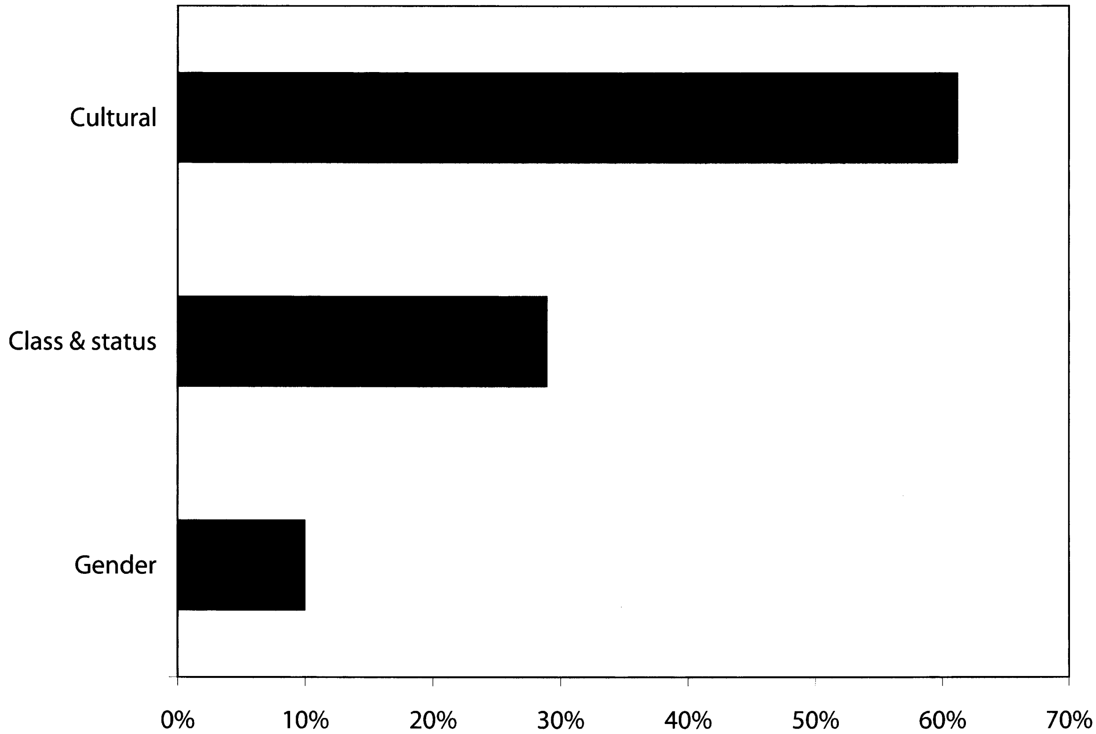

Fig. 2. The relative coverage of categories of expression in a survey of 64 publications concerned with identity in Roman archaeology.

literature, art), the most popular classes of evidence are those that reflect the activities of both high- and low-status social spheres (esp. small finds and pottery). This trend also indicates that materials that have been less commonly studied in the past, such as small finds, have received renewed interest.[29] Furthermore, consideration of traditionally studied subgroups such as the military has shifted away from charting troop movements and identifying historically attested units[30] to more anthropologically informed studies of the Roman army as a diverse community,[31] with research into social practices that defined the military as a distinct social entity.[32] Therefore, it seems that a concern with identity is beginning to offer a more holistic means of understanding social differentiation in the Roman period without entirely abandoning an interest in the articulation of elite and military identities. In spite of such promising approaches, however, the proportion of studies on class and status identity (29%) relative to cultural identity (61%) in Roman archaeology is problematic, especially if the aim is to move beyond traditional notions of Romanization in a meaningful sense.

In contrast to cultural and hierarchical identities, less than 10% of the literature surveyed deals with gender identity (see fig. 2). For the purposes of the present study, this category includes research emphasizing issues of sex, age, and the life course.[33] The insufficient consideration of gender in Anglo-American research in Roman archaeology has already been criticized, with much of this being directed at TRAC participants.[34] This trend is even more surprising given the more extensive literature on gender in recent years in the closely related discipline of classics.[35] By failing to address gender identities adequately, and with the continued focus on Romanization and the negotiation of cultural identities, there is a danger that Roman archaeology will continue to present an unnecessarily distorted narrative of social change in the Roman period. Although the inference of gender identities

[29] Allason-Jones 2001.
[30] E.g., Webster 1981.
[31] James 1999, 2001a.
[32] E.g., Eckardt 2002.
[33] Hockey and James 2003.
[34] Scott 1993b; Laurence 1999, 2001; Hill 2001.
[35] E.g., Foxhall and Salmon 1998.

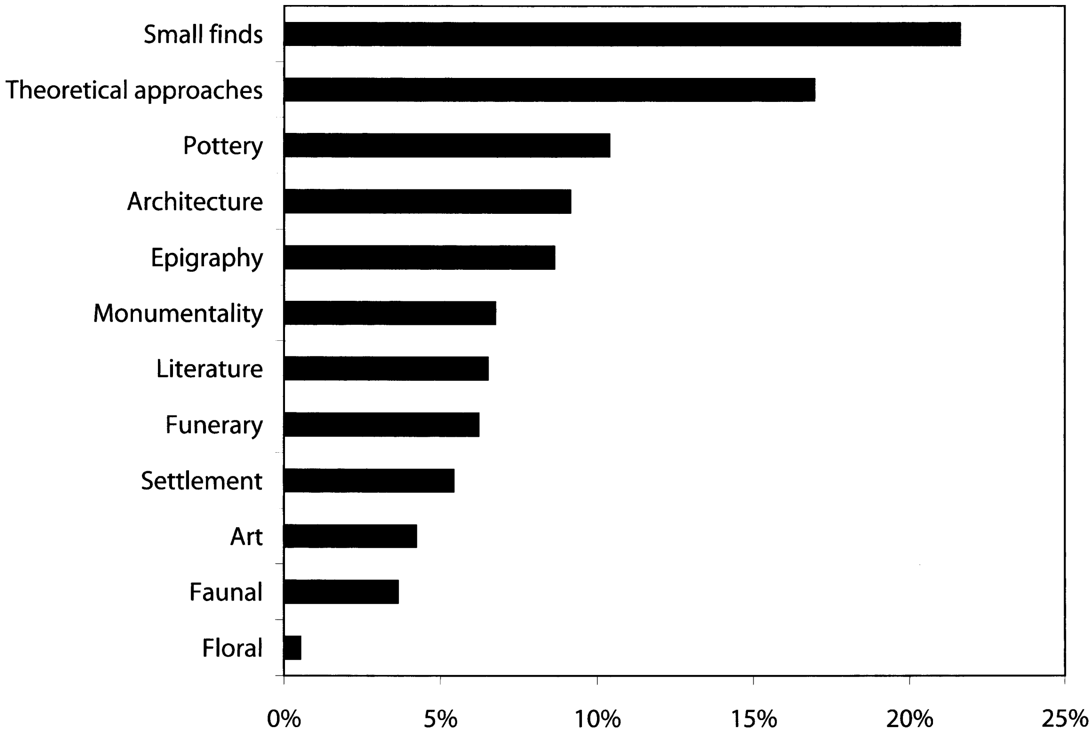

Fig. 3. The relative coverage of categories of evidence in a survey of 64 publications concerned with identity in Roman archaeology.

is more obviously limited to funerary contexts,[36] epigraphy,[37] and gendered artifacts,[38] there is scope for further research on this subject. It is encouraging that in the last five years, the relative emphasis on gender identity has more than doubled when compared with 1995–1999 (see fig. 4). Baker's comments on the shortfall in speakers for her TRAC 2002 session, "Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Women in the Roman Empire," highlights this as a continued area for concern.[39] Indeed, Laurence cites this as further evidence that "the study of women let alone gender remains under-developed not just within TRAC, but within Roman Archaeology as a whole."[40]

Although the recent attention given to identity in Roman archaeology is beginning to address neglected themes (i.e., gender) and reinvigorate the study of particular classes of evidence (i.e., small finds, pottery), there remains an inordinate degree of emphasis on cultural or ethnic identities, which seems rooted in the obsession with the concept of Romanization. Future research needs to focus on identity in its more holistic sense by balancing concern for the cultural with examination of class, status, and gender.

Inferring Identity

As noted, the last five years have seen a considerable upsurge in approaches to identity involving more egalitarian classes of evidence (esp. small finds, being used by both high- and low-status groups) and a relative downturn in studies of the manifestation of elite discourse (e.g., art, architecture, monumentality, literature; see fig. 5). In addition, there has been less interest in evidence such as settlement (including approaches to landscape), which is arguably able to provide only a relatively low-resolution approach to changes in everyday practice and the expression of identity. These trends seem to imply some consideration of the need to elucidate a diverse range of identities, both beyond elites and at a high resolution of analysis. The notable exception to this rule is the renewed concern with epigraphy in recent years, which is generally considered to be primarily a medium for

[36] E.g., Petts 1998b; Gowland 2001, 2004.
[37] E.g., Revell 2000; Hope 2001.
[38] E.g., Jundi and Hill 1998; Allason-Jones 2001; Carr 2005.
[39] Baker 2003.
[40] Laurence 2006, 121.

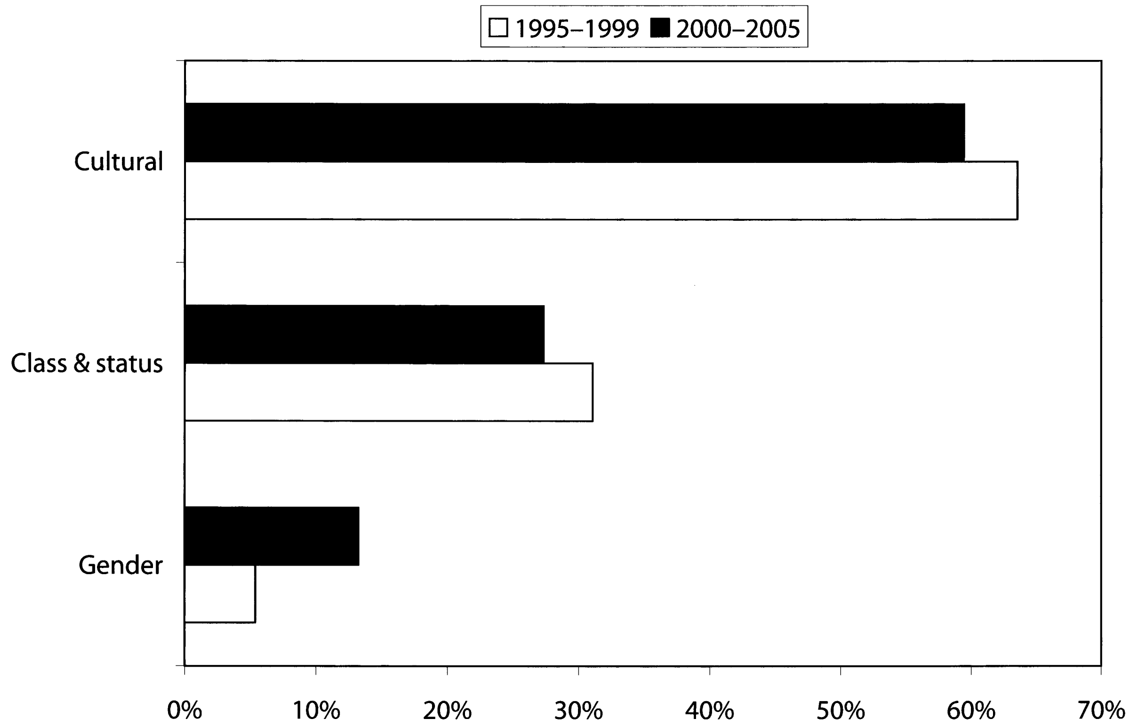

Fig. 4. The relative coverage of categories of expression in a survey of 64 publications concerned with identity in Roman archaeology in 1995–1999 and 2000–2005.

elite expression. Such emphasis on epigraphy underlines its importance as a means of understanding the active rather than passive negotiation of self-image among the higher echelons of society. The only pattern with possible negative implications is the continued lack of attention given to faunal and floral evidence (see fig. 5). While this material is often discussed in terms of diet and its cultural implications, most notably by King,[41] there has been comparatively little explicit concern with the subject of identity (although this pattern could have resulted from the survey's sampling strategy, notably, a lack of consideration of specialist ecofactual literature that may include some consideration of identity).[42] Perhaps this pattern is simply an indication that floral and faunal remains are not perceived to offer the same potential for studying identity as other classes of evidence, in spite of the potential for studying diet and the related cultural practices of butchery and disposal.[43] Nevertheless, the graph in figure 5 conveys a certain optimism concerning the classes of evidence being used to infer identity in Roman archaeology, particularly the focus on material evidence permitting an examination of identities at all levels of society.

Despite the positive trends outlined above, closer analysis of the literature surveyed reveals problems of a conceptual and methodological nature. It is apparent that very few books and papers actually contain any substantial theoretical or methodological discussions on how best to approach identity, even though there has been a significant increase in the number of discussion-based papers on the subject in the last half-decade (see fig. 5).[44] This poses a serious problem, as without adequate theorization, the study of identity in Roman archaeology runs the risk of being characterized in a way akin to the culture-historical archaeology of the mid 20th century, in which ancient peoples were sometimes equated with generic combinations of material culture. Moreover, without at least some explicit discussion of what identity actually is and how

[41] King 1984, 1999a, 1999b, 2001.

[42] E.g., Meadows 1997, 1999; Hawkes 2001.

[43] See Maltby (1989, 1994) on butchery and Hill (1995) on the disposal of faunal remains in Iron Age Britain.

[44] E.g., Jones 1997; Grahame 1998a; Wells 1999; Roymans 2004.

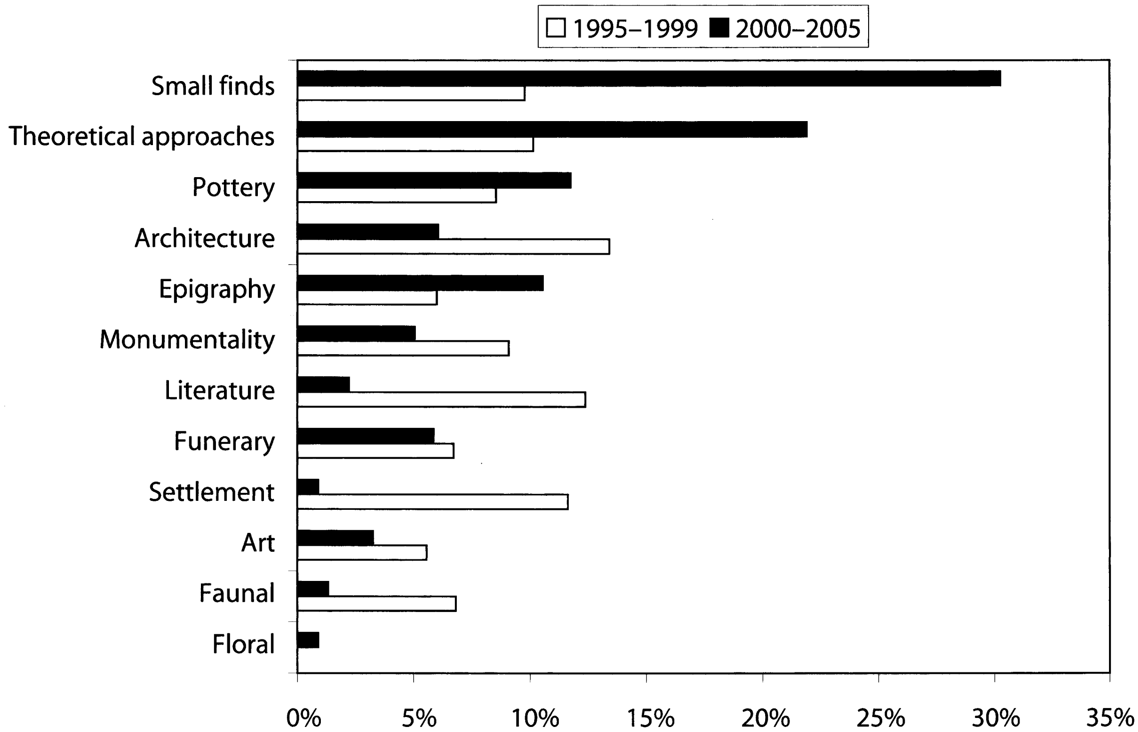

Fig. 5. The relative coverage of categories of evidence in a survey of 64 publications concerned with identity in Roman archaeology in 1995–1999 and 2000–2005.

it is articulated, some studies give the impression that the term has simply been thrown into discussion because it is fashionable. While I agree with Mattingly's optimistic comment that "as material culture was used at every level in society to express identity, to some extent archaeologists can 'read' it as a sort of text," it sets a dangerous precedent by implying that to infer identity from material culture is a simple conceptual process.[45] As Wells states, "we cannot assume a recurrent, consistent correlation between a particular kind of material culture and a specific identity."[46] I hope to demonstrate here that approaches to identity in Roman archaeology can be theoretically informed without recourse to the jargon often associated with theoretical archaeology.

The concept of identity is problematic to archaeologists because it is ultimately a modern construct for social analysis of the past.[47] Furthermore, identities in the past are essentially subjective categories, which can often appear contradictory, especially to the remote modern viewer.[48] In particular, the issue of whether identity can only be expressed consciously or unconsciously is of potential importance, especially in distinguishing between the articulation of identities in the past and their perception in the present by the archaeologist. In Roman archaeology, these complications are partially eased through the survival of literature and epigraphy, in which identities were actively expressed through use of the written or inscribed word. It could be argued that the survival of such documentary evidence is more of a curse than a blessing, creating an unnecessarily elite-dominated and Romano-centric discourse. Indeed, one of the biggest advantages of studying identity through material culture is that it allows us to understand social groups and cultures that were not able or empowered to write their own histories and simultaneously permits the analysis of other spheres of social life in which identity was negotiated. While accepting that it is largely impossible to gain an accurate picture through the study of archaeological remains of identities as self-perceived entities that existed in the past, care must be taken to ensure that identity is not simply imposed onto the past by the analyst in the present.

[45] Mattingly 2004, 22.
[46] Wells 2001, 25.
[47] Geary 1983, 16.
[48] Roymans 2004, 2.

The most popular solution to the problem of inferring identity from material culture is through emphasizing the role of material culture as an active participant in social practice. Jones defines identity as being "based on shifting, situational, subjective identifications of self and others, which are rooted in ongoing daily practice and historical experience, but also subject to transformation and discontinuity."[49] This opposes traditional culture-historical approaches that objectively defined social groups as discreet units with direct material correlates, with identity being assigned on the basis of the analyst's perception of culture differences. The idea that identity is "rooted in ongoing daily practice" is of central importance. Identity is created in particular ways of doing, or lifestyles. This is particularly useful from an archaeological perspective, with the implication that by studying the role of material culture in social practice, the issue of identity can be broached. As Jenkins states, "identity is produced and reproduced both in discourse—narrative, rhetoric and representation—and in the practical, often very material, consequences of identification."[50]

The emphasis on the role of social practice in archaeological definitions and approaches to identity stems from a much wider array of literature in sociology and anthropology. Particularly influential is Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, the "generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is, a unitary set of choices of persons, goods, practices."[51] The *habitus* is rooted in the material conditions of everyday existence[52] and is learned or acquired through interactive practices, in a "process of familiarity rather than learning," which comes about by the act of living in a world composed of some given order.[53] While the *habitus* helps to explain how identity is inculcated from the bottom up, or internally generated, it is less able to explain changes in identity through a person's lifetime.[54] This aspect of identity is very much dependent on a person's or group's position in the wider social hierarchy and network of power relations, which often impose certain constraints on the extent to which people are able to express their identities and how they are perceived by the rest of society. For example, in Barth's study of ethnic identity in the Sudan, he argues that changes in identity were directly linked to the economic and political circumstances of certain individuals.[55] Jones notes that "the extent to which ethnicity is embedded in pre-existing cultural realities represented by a shared *habitus* is highly variable and contingent upon the cultural transformations engendered by the nature of interaction and the power relations between groups of people."[56]

Returning to the archaeological evidence, perhaps the most obvious spheres of practice with material correlates in which to recognize identity are consumption (the material by-products of eating and drinking), dress (including a range of artifact types relating to physical appearance and hygiene), funerary ritual, and the organization of household and settlement space. Pottery provides a good example. In the past, culture-historical archaeologists often uncritically equated distributions of characteristic pottery types (and other artifacts) with the movements of historically attested peoples, such as the Belgae.[57] By emphasizing the functional aspects of different types of ceramic vessel, it is possible to understand the role of pottery as an expression of the social practices of everyday eating and drinking. Through the identification of recurrent combinations of particular vessel forms with an active role in different consumption practices (e.g., cooking, drinking, preparation, serving), the social use of pottery (as consumption technology) can be addressed. Furthermore, by looking at the contexts in which different vessel types and fabrics are found (e.g., domestic, funerary, military, religious, regional), it is feasible to approach the role of pottery in the articulation of a complex web of interrelated identities. Such emphasis on depositional context is critical, for, as Hill argues, "to address the themes of daily life and identity . . . requires far more than simple regional distributions of artefact types etc; it also requires closer examination of the specific social contexts in which things were used and of how they entered the archaeological record."[58] This approach to pottery and identity is discussed in further detail in the second case study below.

Notable attempts to consider social practice and agency in Roman archaeology include Gardner's analysis of the Late Roman military in Britain[59] and Chadwick's consideration of the Romano-British countryside.[60] Both profess a concern with daily life through archaeologies of habitation and dwelling. Chadwick advocates more in-depth analysis of depo-

[49] Jones 1997, 13–14.
[50] Jenkins 2004, 176.
[51] Bourdieu 1998, 8.
[52] Bourdieu 1977.
[53] Miller 1987, 104.
[54] Jenkins 1982, 270.
[55] Barth 1969, 24.
[56] Jones 1997, 128.
[57] E.g., Hawkes and Dunning 1930.
[58] Hill 2001, 17.
[59] Gardner 2001, 2002.
[60] Chadwick 2004.

sitional behavior as part of "detailed archaeologies of past practice examining all spheres of material life,"[61] and Gardner, being more explicitly concerned with identity, wishes to apply structuration theory[62] with a "multi-dimensional approach to material culture, encompassing stratigraphy and the built environment, and all of the major categories of artefacts, in this case pottery, coins, small finds and faunal remains."[63] Despite the obvious potential and apparent theoretical rigor of these studies, however, both Chadwick and Gardner fail to demonstrate the value of their respective approaches. By his own admission, Chadwick's account falls foul of the "modern distinctions we place between different materials and practices."[64] In contrast, Gardner seems paralyzed by the reality that "to attempt to label any material culture in a particular way is to ascribe an identity to it, which immediately forces a confrontation with different kinds of identity and different processes of identification."[65] Although Gardner demonstrates various ways in which assemblages of Late Roman military finds may attest different identities (beyond narrow conceptions of military versus civilian), no further indication or description is given of what these identities actually amount to or how they relate to one another. Although this approach escapes the trap of directly equating material culture with identity, a more serious problem is highlighted by failing to describe and differentiate identities. Indeed, for identity to have utility as a tool for creating new narratives of social change in the Roman period with greater explanatory power, it is vital for us to be able to describe social categories (however blurred and overlapping) through archaeological evidence.

WRITING NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY

Although the literature survey discussed above highlights some general trends about how identity is being studied in Roman archaeology, it is much less suited to addressing the more in-depth question of the value of studies of identity in explaining social variability in the ancient world. Consequently, this section considers two case studies in which narratives of identity in the Roman world have been attempted. These studies were selected because both involve explicit theoretical and methodological approaches to the issue of identity in Roman archaeology, sharing a broadly common theoretical tradition but examining different classes of evidence and deriving from different academic contexts (the Netherlands and Britain). Furthermore, each study presents an example of how narratives of identity might be constructed using archaeological evidence, which forms the focal point of the following discussion section. The first case study is Roymans' investigation of Batavian ethnicity in northern Gaul,[66] and the second comprises a more extensive overview of my own work on ceramic consumption and deposition in southeast Britain.[67]

Case Study 1: The Construction of a Batavian Identity

The conceptual focus of Roymans' study of the lower Rhine frontier (ca. 50 B.C.E.–70 C.E.) is specifically on the ethnic or cultural identity of a historically attested group known as the Batavians. In his interpretation, emphasis is placed on the Vienna School's concept of ethnogenesis, a historical phenomenon by which social groups (e.g., peoples, tribes) develop, change, and disappear over time.[68] The focus on the ethnic dimension of identity means that the methodological thrust of the study is directed at identifying the expression of ethnicity at a regional level. A key research goal was to be able to distinguish between the Batavians as a political entity and their broader genesis as an ethnic group. Therefore, Roymans looked at a variety of classes of evidence, including literary sources (revealing the portrayal of the Batavians by the Roman elite), coinage (providing clues about networks of social relations and the expression of tribal authority), epigraphy (through which elite self-image was articulated), public monumentality (aiding in the legitimation of a shared identity through provision of a communal focus), and small finds (indicating regional trends in consumption).

The study begins with a consideration of pre-Roman developments in the lower Rhine area in the Late Iron Age,[69] a region typically considered a backwater due to a relative absence of major fortified settlements and rich metalwork. Roymans argues convincingly for significant change in this period, principally increased social stratification, evidenced by the adoption of coinage, the emergence of core areas, and the development of major nucleated settlements. Important evidence pertaining to the expression of identity includes the constitution of a shared identity in regional sanctuaries and the mass consumption of glass bracelets,

[61] Chadwick 2004.
[62] Giddens 1984.
[63] Gardner 2002, 329.
[64] Chadwick 2004, 104.
[65] Gardner 2002, 324.
[66] Roymans 2004.
[67] Pitts 2005c.
[68] Pohl 1997, 8. The Vienna School was concerned with Early Medieval history.
[69] Roymans 2004, 9–22.

the latter being likely indicators of adulthood among females. Having established the Iron Age background, Roymans then deals with political matters, including the initial impact of Rome (notably Caesar's conquests and associated ethnic reshuffles) and the adoption and development of regional coinages.[70] In particular, evidence for continuity in the local practices of household construction, pottery production, and the wearing of glass arm rings does not support Tacitus' claim that the Batavians settled the uninhabited Rhine delta. Instead, the analysis of coin distributions implies that the Batavian ethnogenesis originated through the integration of a small immigrant group from the east bank of the middle Rhine with the local population of the Rhine Meuse delta.

Later in the study, the issue of Batavian ethnicity is approached more directly.[71] Through the analysis of a large corpus of finds from the settlement of Kessel/Lith, Roymans argues that the site functioned as a cult center and an important focal point for the articulation of Batavian identity. As a cult location, Kessel/Lith probably acted as an arena for the manipulation of power and elite competition, as evidenced in the large proportion of high-denomination coins and the strong martial character of the composite finds assemblage (including weaponry and human bone with battle injuries). Following the arrival of Rome, the Augustan period was marked out as a formative phase in the promotion of an inclusive Roman identity for the Batavians. From this period onward, public monuments stressing the alliance with Rome were erected by elites to curry favor with the imperial authorities and to simultaneously gain the support of the wider local population, thus reinforcing the creation of a collective identity.

Imagery and epigraphy are also examined in terms of the dominant Roman images of the Batavians and the Batavians' self-image.[72] The overall conclusion of the study is that Rome had a profound effect on the establishment of the Batavians as a political entity and an ethnic group with a strong sense of its own identity, this being most strongly apparent through the analysis of epigraphy. Through the use of archaeological and epigraphic evidence, a convincing case is made for the existence of foundation myths surrounding the Roman Hercules and the deified Caesar (the latter may have personally permitted the Batavians to settle in the area around the Rhine/Meuse delta), which would have helped legitimize the power of the Batavian elite. While this new identity was being negotiated, links were maintained with the past through the retention and consolidation of the pre-Roman sacrificial and religious landscape.

Roymans' study provides a convincing narrative of changing cultural identity on the lower Rhine frontier, but there remain several areas of concern pertaining to his analysis of identity. A large conceptual problem is the focus on labels derived from classical sources (not least of which is the umbrella term "Batavians"), rather than a description of social entities according to material practices. Indeed, there is little explicit discussion of the role of material culture in social practice in Roymans' study, although this concern is implicit in the classes of evidence studied and the resulting inferences that are made. For example, Late Iron Age coinage provided an insight into the expression of tribal authority; the deposition of Roman military objects in civilian contexts illustrates the importance of martial ideology in the Batavian self-image; the distribution of writing equipment (e.g., bronze seal boxes) indicates the spread of literacy; and the continued use of unique regional dress accessories (glass arm rings) from the Late Iron Age into the Early Roman period demonstrates a strong demographic and cultural link with the pre-Roman past of the Batavians. Furthermore, although a large portion of the narrative concerning the negotiation of Batavian ethnicity is centered on the elite discourse of epigraphy, the tag of "overconcentration on elites" is partially avoided through the consideration of a variety of classes of archaeological evidence (esp. small finds).[73] By demonstrating the effect of Roman power and imperialism on the negotiation and realignment of cultural identities, this remains a good example of the potential benefits of using identity to describe and explain sociocultural change. Nevertheless, given the diversity of material culture considered, it is unfortunate that the author focuses primarily on cultural identities, especially given the potential for more explicit attention to changing gender and group affiliations.

Case Study 2: Consumption and Identity in Southeast Britain

My approach to the problem of identity was to examine the everyday practice of eating and drinking through a contextual analysis of the relative proportions of different functional classes of pottery (i.e., cooking, dining, and drinking vessels).[74] In contrast

[70] Roymans 2004, 23–101.
[71] Roymans 2004, 103–260.
[72] Roymans 2004, 221–60.
[73] James 2001b, 199.
[74] Pitts 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c.

to the previous case study, which considered the expression of ethnic identity through a variety of classes of evidence, I focused solely on the role of pottery in social practice, particularly in terms of domestic consumption and deposition, and funerary feasting and ritual. Being largely resistant to taphonomic decay, often closely datable and largely ubiquitous in the Roman period, pottery represents an ideal medium from which to study social differentiation, especially in light of its ability to provide a bottom-up perspective of consumption practice at virtually all levels of society. In the primary study, I examined the consumption and deposition of pottery at more than 20 sites in Essex and Hertfordshire dating to ca. 50 B.C.E.–200 C.E., using both standard means of describing pottery assemblages and the multivariate technique of correspondence analysis.[75] The main conclusions concerning identity are discussed below in terms of four principal periods of change. These unequal portions of time are not arbitrary and reflect both general patterning in the assemblages and the concern with the negotiation of identity through consumption in the Iron Age to Roman transition. The main trends are summarized in figures 6, 7, 8, and table 1.

The Late Iron Age, ca. 50–15 B.C.E. In the first period of interest, defined by the earliest appearance of Roman material culture in the region, domestic pottery assemblages are dominated by locally made cooking forms (jars), with the occasional occurrence of imported wine amphoras. Funerary contexts are often characterized by much higher proportions of consumption technology, especially large wheel-thrown pedestaled drinking vessels, wine amphoras, and metal drinking accoutrements (see fig. 6). The relative prominence of drinking in a mortuary context compared with the domestic sphere (see figs. 7, 8) suggests a ritual element, which is seemingly echoed in the domestic practice through the prominence of drinking vessels in certain feature types (i.e., pits) as opposed to others (linear features such as ditches and gullies being more strongly associated with cooking forms such as jars) (see table 1). It is probable that the high visibility and quantity of such consumption technology (especially drinking equipment) in funerary contexts, coupled with distinctions in the deposition of this material in the domestic sphere, hints at the importance of feasting and social drinking in Late Iron Age society, probably involving large quantities of locally made beer.[76] It is likely that feasting, as an important form of social practice, represented a means for certain individuals publicly to reaffirm and negotiate their elite identity and position within society, as witnessed in the disparity between funerary and everyday assemblages.[77] This seems to have involved the aggressive manipulation of deeply rooted communal drinking practices to reassert both vertical and horizontal social relations.

The Pre-Roman Iron Age, ca. 15 B.C.E.–40 C.E. Taking place roughly a generation after Caesar's campaigns in the region, the first major period of change closely corresponded with the founding of oppida (e.g., Camulodunum) and the increased use of Roman imagery on indigenous coinage.[78] From ca. 25 to 15 B.C.E., domestic and funerary assemblages became increasingly characterized by the importation and copying of new Gallo-Belgic fine wares in a variety of more specialized forms, especially drinking vessels, tablewares for dining (e.g., platters), and serving vessels (flagons). Although this pattern may simply indicate a technological shift away from production of certain forms in wood (being archaeologically invisible due to the absence of waterlogged conditions), the sudden proliferation of new ceramic shapes seems to imply a shift in styles of consumption. At the same time, continued emphasis was placed on funerary contexts and pits for the deposition of material associated with consumption (see table 1). This implies that although feasting and competitive commensality seem to have maintained their role as mechanisms for the articulation of internal social relations, the spread of new styles of consumption and oppida settlements represented new ways of expressing power and identity, betraying a dialogue with wider social processes affecting northwestern Europe.

Particularly important was the probable establishment of this part of Britain as a Roman client kingdom and the intensification of links with other Roman clients and annexed groups in Gaul.[79] This backdrop would have provided a social context for the transmission and molding of new consumption practices, with suites of Gallic-style pottery potentially offering a middle way between more civilized Mediterranean practices and Iron Age feasting, characterized by large drinking and dining vessels. It is likely that this expanded repertoire of practice at the top of society took place as a means of preserving horizontal links with high- and middle-status subgroups in northern Gaul (who were under more direct Roman influence). The rich burial at Welwyn Garden City, dated to the

[75] Pitts 2005c.
[76] Sealey 1999; Pitts 2005b.
[77] Dietler 1990, 1999a, 1999b, 2001.
[78] Creighton 2000.
[79] Creighton 2000.

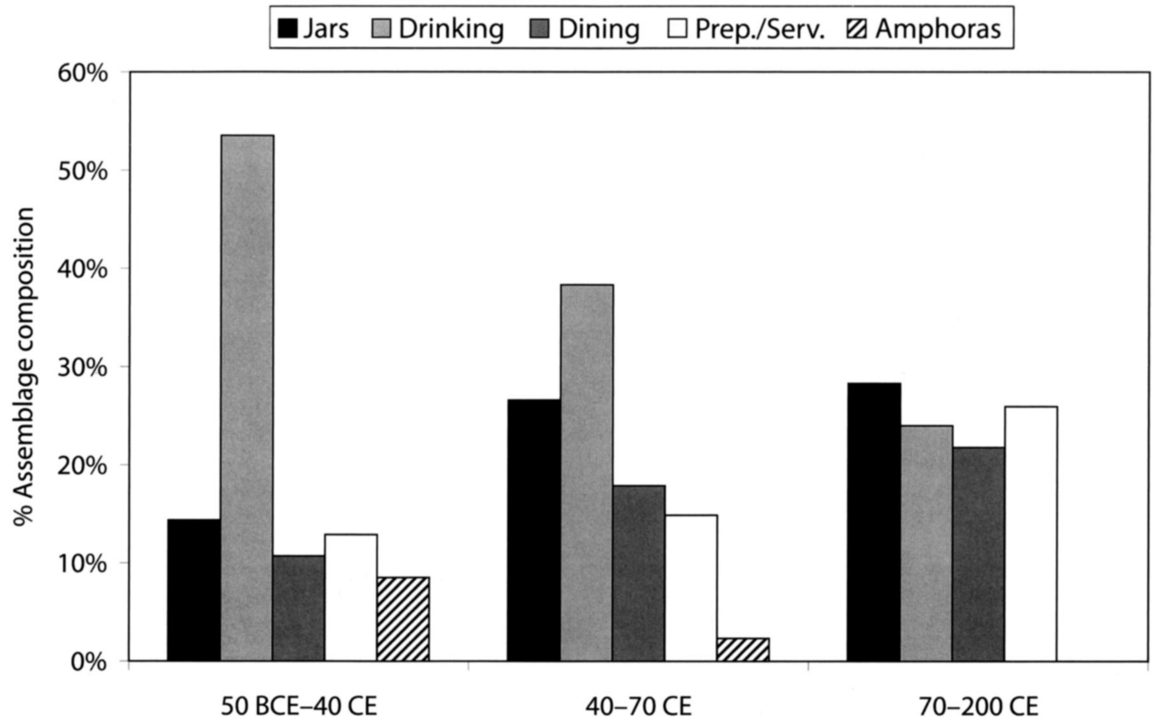

Fig 6. Composition of funerary assemblages in Essex and Hertfordshire, including glass, metal, and ceramic vessels, ca. 50 B.C.E.–200 C.E.

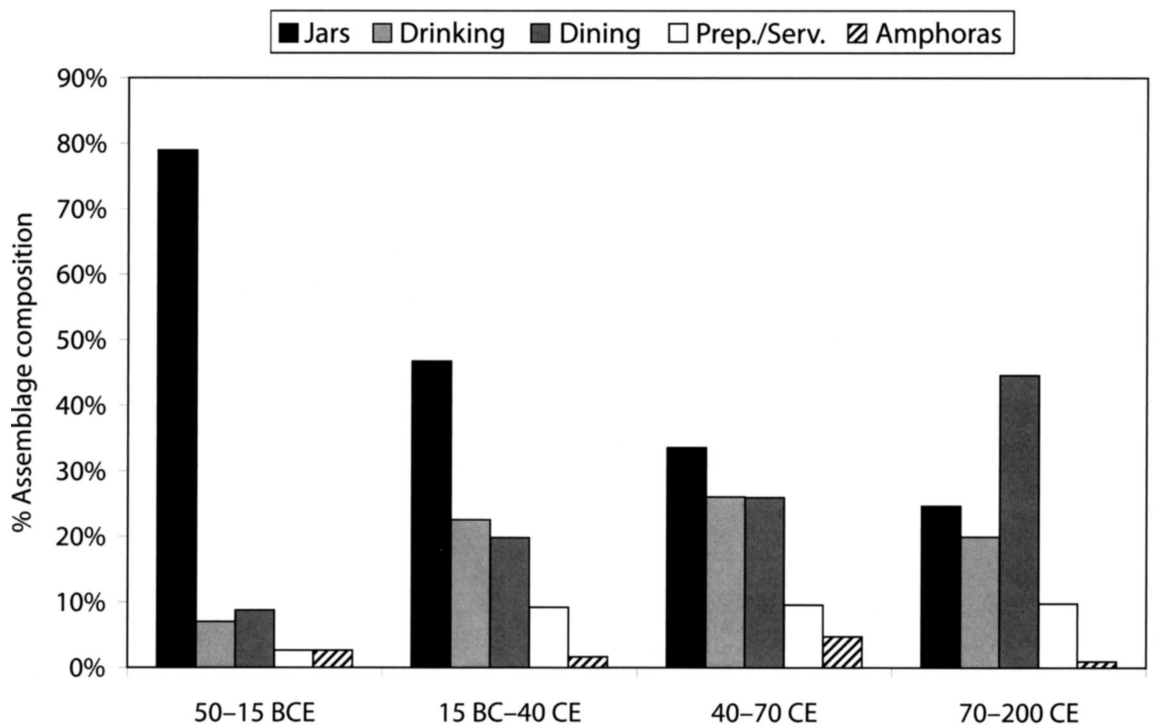

Fig. 7. Composition of domestic pottery assemblages in Essex and Hertfordshire, ca. 50 B.C.E.–200 C.E. Sites are quantified by minimum number of vessels.

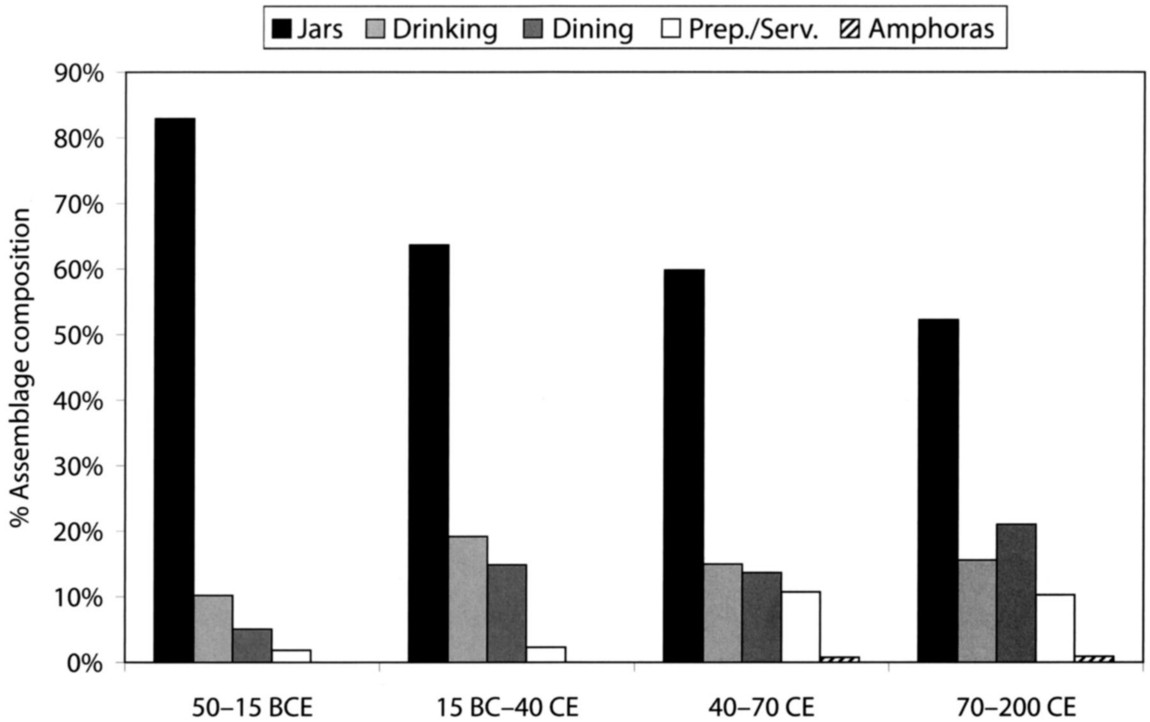

Fig. 8. Composition of domestic pottery assemblages in Essex and Hertfordshire, ca. 50 B.C.E.–200 C.E. Sites quantified by estimated vessel equivalent.

start of this period (ca. 25–15 B.C.E.), represents a defining moment in the transition as the first example of an assemblage (funerary or otherwise) with significant emphasis on drinking and dining (or eating) vessels.[80] This implies that changes in consumption practice started with the elites and subsequently spread through their immediate subsidiaries (e.g., lower kin or household chiefs, most likely through communal feasting events), precipitating slightly later phenomena including the widespread copying of Gallic pottery styles, the emergence of a tier of "middle-class" burials emphasizing similar practices, and the everyday routines of disposing pottery according to established belief systems.

The Post-Conquest Period, ca. 40–70 C.E. Following the invasion in 43 C.E., direct Roman impact was limited to the official urban centers of Colchester and Verulamium, where the high proportion of pottery forms such as flagons, mortaria, Samian Ware, and the relative absence of Gallo-Belgic fine wares differentiated these new towns from contemporary indigenous sites throughout the region. With ceramic consumption and deposition at indigenous sites largely following the pattern of the previous phase, because of the emphasis on large drinking vessels, striking differences are apparent with the sites officially founded through Roman intervention. This is best illustrated in the disparity between assemblages and implicated consumption practices from the fortress and colonia site at Colchester and the nearby indigenous occupation at Sheepen, where it seems likely that for a short time, local communities (preferring to consume in a style based on large Gallic drinking vessels) coexisted alongside the Roman colonists (who favored a "military" template of consumption emphasizing eating, not drinking).[81] It is probable that this situation was part of the standard Roman practice of devolving power to local government in the civitas system, with some of the representatives of certain local communities being allowed to retain some power and to administer on Rome's behalf.[82] If this was the case, it made sense for them to continue to deploy new material culture in a traditional fashion, to maintain their identities in spite of the altered political situation. Although the

[80] Stead 1967.

[81] Pitts 2005b, 2005c; Pitts and Perring 2006.

[82] Millett 1990a, 65.

Table 1. The Functional Composition (Ceramic) of Feature Types in Essex and Hertfordshire, ca. 50 B.C.E –200 C.E.

	Jars (%)	Drinking (%)	Dining (%)	Prep./Serv. (%)
50 B.C.E.–70 C.E. (EVE)[a]				
Linear (e.g., ditches)	72.52	11.45	12.81	3.22
Pits	63.48	17.20	14.39	4.93
50 B.C.E.–70 C.E. (MNV)[b]				
Cellars/shafts	45.83	29.17	20.83	4.17
Linear	64.31	19.62	11.44	4.63
Pits	32.18	29.28	26.63	11.92
Wells	36.65	39.13	19.25	4.97
70–200 C.E. (EVE)				
Linear	63.40	14.35	19.82	2.43
Pits	53.19	16.42	19.72	10.68
Wells	27.65	15.59	56.76	0.00
70–200 C.E. (MNV)				
Cellars/shafts	13.04	30.43	52.17	4.35
Linear	45.40	17.47	28.55	8.58
Pits	37.92	22.08	29.67	10.33
Wells	27.78	22.22	38.89	11.11

[a] EVE = estimated vessel equivalent
[b] MNV = minimum number of vessels

structures of social power had been altered irrevocably, the indigenous elites had been offered positions in the upper echelons of the new order. With their positions seemingly secure, there would have been little motivation for the British aristocracy to adopt a new identity wholesale, especially one based on the colonists' Roman military subculture, explaining the difference in consumption habits with the incoming colonists.

With the most striking changes in consumption practice in this period occurring in the newly founded Roman urban centers at Colchester and Verulamium, changes in consumption practice in the rest of society are less clear-cut. As with the end of the Late Iron Age period discussed above, however, a richly furnished burial dating to ca. 50–60 C.E. (broadly in the local "Welwyn" tradition) at Folly Lane in Verulamium appears to have marked a watershed in social practice and identity for the whole region, again hinting at the beginnings of change in the elite sphere.[83] The ceramic assemblage accompanying this grave indicates consumption practices with closer affinity to urban or military practice (emphasizing more civilized-style dining as opposed to Iron Age drinking), which would go on to define the next (and largest) period of stability in regional consumption and depositional practices. The characteristics of this grave indicate that the deceased (or the deceased's successors) had need to negotiate a hybrid identity through reference to Roman provincial urban styles of eating, local communal drinking practices (indicated by six wine amphoras referencing earlier Welwyn-style graves), and continental elite burial practices (as indicated by use of a shaft-burial rite that has multiple parallels in northern France and Luxembourg).[84]

The Flavian Period to the End of the Second Century, ca. 70–200 C.E. The final and most significant period of change coincided with the aftermath of the Boudican revolt of 60/1 C.E. and the subsequent consolidation

[83] Niblett 1999.

[84] Niblett 1999, 394–403. How such changes in ceramic consumption and depositional practice came to be negotiated in the rest of society are described below.

of Roman rule in Britain. In ceramic terms, domestic assemblages are characterized by a widespread decline of both Gallic imports and locally copied vessels, with a progressive shift in emphasis at sites with Iron Age origins from drinking vessels to tablewares (e.g., platters, dishes; see figs. 7, 8). Pottery assemblages in funerary contexts are not as spectacular as they had been in the earlier half of the first century C.E. and feature an increasingly programmatic combination of vessel forms (usually a jar, a drinking vessel [a beaker or cup], an eating/dining vessel [a dish], and a serving vessel [a flagon]; see fig. 6). In the absence of any strong indication of social differentiation in accompanied cremation cemeteries, this patterning possibly indicates the emergence of low–middle status group identities based on burial societies or collegia, providing their members with a "standard" funeral with pottery that had been acquired in bulk and stockpiled over time.[85] In this period of more than 100 years, the rate of change was variable, although it was often seemingly dictated by a site's proximity to Roman urban settlement and the road infrastructure. Although the distinction between the ceramic contents of pits and ditches remains consistent, wells began to be heavily favored for the deposition of tablewares and dining vessels (see table 1). Furthermore, the characteristic associations of pottery at Colchester's colonia in the preceding phase formed the basis of an urban depositional profile, which became increasingly evident at indigenous sites into the second century.

Two broad factors may account for the sudden and widespread changes evident in this period: imperial investment in the aftermath of the Boudican revolt (from the top down) and a second generation acceptance of Roman hegemony and domination (from the bottom up). The changes in funerary and everyday consumption and deposition, however, require further explanation. The spread of new pottery forms in the aftermath of the Boudican revolt can be partially explained through state investment in the production of new ceramic forms, but this does not fully answer the question of why the new forms were so readily adopted and, perhaps more importantly, why the traditional practices of communal drinking were apparently abandoned. It appears likely that the indigenous practice of feasting had lost its ability to create social distinctions as a marker of elite identity, as power and conspicuous consumption had shifted to an urban setting, where it was transferred to the next generation through citizenship and patronage. In contrast, the typically muted continuity of pre-conquest depositional practices highlights the relative inability of much of the rural population to express their identities without reference to Rome (at least in ceramic terms), with the spread of new material culture beyond the towns being a factor of proximity to the urban system, rather than any manifestation of consumer choice.

It is likely that the emergence or reconfiguration of a "middle class" (as indicated by the collegia-style burial practices) played a vital role in the transmission of new practices. This new social entity (mostly evident at locations close to state infrastructure, at nodal points in the road network) would have been an important part of the new order, vital for the rebuilding of the province and the continued extraction of necessary surplus, yet a step down from the elites in the previous generation whose complicity and direct partnership would have been initially essential to maintain peace in the region. As old feasting and drinking practices could no longer be as effective in securing social ties and allegiances (with the urban elite much further removed in culture and consumption practices), the collegia might have offered a more constrained version of pre-Roman commensal practice, allowing wider participation (for those with sufficient wealth) but with much-reduced opportunity for individual prestige and power.

Discussion

By choosing two very different archaeological approaches to identity, I hope to have demonstrated the potential of this perspective as a means of furthering our understanding of sociocultural change in the Roman period. Although the narratives produced in both case studies are to some degree guilty of privileging the discussion of cultural identities and the role of elites, such criticism is arguably deflected by a detailed consideration of how changes at the top of the social hierarchy came to influence broader changes in daily practice. It would be helpful, however, to see how the identities and classes highlighted through consumption and disposal practices in both case studies were further elaborated in terms of gender through a consideration of complementary classes of archaeological evidence. As both examples focus on the Iron Age to Roman transition, it is somewhat inevitable that the huge changes brought about through the arrival of Roman imperialism are discussed in terms of cultural identities and the principal agents and receptors of change (i.e., the elites). Perhaps instead of concentrating on transitional periods (i.e., Iron Age to Ro-

[85] Biddulph 2005, 37.

man, Late Roman to Early Medieval), research into the intervening periods of relative stability would provide important additional insights into the complex negotiation of identity.

A less transition-focused account can be found in Mattingly's latest book, a largely synthetic work on Roman Britain, which represents a sustained attempt to combine traditional historical narrative with archaeological evidence under the interpretive banner of cultural identity.[86] Although this study represents a welcome paradigm shift away from Romanization in stressing the diversity of discrepant experience and response to Roman imperialism, explicit consideration of how identity is negotiated, and moreover, how it might be studied through archaeological evidence, is absent. Given such lack of theorization and the wide-ranging scope of the project, Mattingly's characterization of identities in Roman Britain sometimes lacks analytical nuance, with the study focusing on "aggregate group identities: the military, urban and rural communities, while also demonstrating some of the regional, chronological and social variance within each of these broad groups."[87] However, despite this criticism, Mattingly's repositioning of discussions surrounding identity in Roman Britain within the wider interpretive framework of the ancient economy and the exploitative nature of Roman imperialism is welcome and timely.

Implicit in Mattingly's latest book, and a recurrent feature of both case studies here, is an emphasis on the role of power relations in the articulation of identity, both in respect to Rome and within the internal hierarchy of society. This concern is vital if the paradigm is to have any continued utility in Roman archaeology, as it helps move beyond merely describing diversity (in order to refute outdated models of Romanization) to explaining it. Indeed, Mattingly recently argued that "identity is integrally bound up with power in society; as such, the creation of provincial identities cannot have taken place in a vacuum, isolated from the power negotiations between the Roman empire and its subject peoples. What is often lacking is consideration of how these power dynamics operated, both top down and bottom up."[88] One way of approaching the operation of such "power dynamics" is through the investigation of archaeologically visible social practices that, depending on the exclusion or inclusion of the individual concerned, can be simultaneously empowering and/or subordinating. In this sense, identity is defined by the extent of participation in, or exclusion from, different spheres of social life, with being "Roman" representing only one dimension in a person's collective identity. Identity is thus negotiated in the dialogue between the internally generated cultural traditions and practices that promote cohesion and inclusivity within society and the externally imposed realities of an individual's placement in the broader hierarchy of social power.

Given the importance of understanding the nature of power relations in social change,[89] a focus on identity could be potentially misguided as the principal means of approaching ancient societies. Although elucidating different identities and social categories is vital to provide a framework for discussing power relations, there is a present danger that the more important issue of power relations may become secondary. Indeed, a worrying trend with much of the literature considered here on Roman identity is the extent to which important issues underpinning identity (not least the nature and articulation of the ancient economy) are becoming marginalized in the focus on expression and outward negotiation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

When this paper was presented at TRAC 2006 in Cambridge, it was particularly noticeable that identity was the most dominant theme at the conference, with approximately half of the papers using the term in their titles or abstracts. Such overwhelming interest raises the question of whether identity warrants the amount of attention it currently enjoys in Anglo-American research in Roman archaeology. It has been noted here that many studies concerning identity over the last decade have either over-focused on the cultural component (effectively prolonging the tired Romanization debate) or have failed to follow through promising theoretical approaches with robust empirical studies. Furthermore, there is a worrying trend that important issues such as the ancient economy and power relations are being sidelined through an explicit focus on identity. The main advantage of studying identity is the freedom it allows for the recognition and explanation of diverse patterning and social categories in the archaeological record, not to limit its interpretation in terms of the over-simplified constructs of Roman and native. The issue should not be regarded solely as a means of administering a fatal blow to Romanization but instead should be treated as an independent research theme in its own right. Indeed, if conducted uncritically, the study of identity in

[86] Mattingly 2006.
[87] Mattingly 2006, 520.
[88] Mattingly 2004, 6–7.
[89] E.g., Scott 1990.

the Roman empire could become a descriptive search for social groupings, somewhat akin to the culture-historical characterization of archaeological cultures. It is important that identity be used as a perspective for understanding and explaining change through a consideration of the role of material culture in social practice and not simply be used as an end in itself. Like all theories, identity must be understood as a modern construct that is built upon certain key theoretical assumptions, and it is critical that it is not simply read directly from archaeological remains without the use of appropriate methodologies simultaneously rooted in theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, given that the application of this theme is still in its infancy and that many of its proponents are at early stages in their careers, perhaps only time will tell whether or not identity in Roman archaeology is truly a case of "the emperor's new clothes."

DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS AND ANCIENT HISTORY
AMORY BUILDING
UNIVERSITY OF EXETER
RENNES DRIVE
EXETER, DEVON EX4 4RJ
UNITED KINGDOM
M.E.J.PITTS@EXETER.AC.UK

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